Culture



Dreamworks' "How to Train Your Dragon" is a live-action remake of the 2010 animated movie of the same name, based on a children’s book by British author Cressida Cowell. (Universal Pictures)



by Elizabeth Hamilton

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 21, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

What's the point of a live-action remake? I asked myself this question while sitting in a theater packed with families excited to see the new "How to Train Your Dragon," a live-action remake of the 2010 animated movie of the same name based on a

children's book series by British author Cressida Cowell.

The kids in my theater were dressed in dragon masks and T-shirts portraying the black dragon Toothless' catlike grin, a testament to the excited fandom for this story. Nobody seemed to mind that they'd basically seen the whole thing before.

With the exception of a few almost imperceptible changes — the addition of a minor character's strained relationship with his father, a more diverse cast — you could play the old beside the new and hardly know the difference. Both were written and directed by the same Canadian filmmaker, Dean Deblois, and Gerard Butler stars again as the hardened Viking father, so fading into the pre-fossilized character that he might as well have been a cartoon. Certainly, all the CGI in this live-action makes it feel, well, cartoonish.

> Like Hiccup, I too want to believe that the evil in the world is tameable, that my enemy might become my friend. "How to Train Your Dragon" makes this seem possible.
>
> Tweet this

"How to Train Your Dragon," which opened in theaters June 13, is only the latest in a string of live-action remakes. Most of the iconic Disney animations have been redone, from "Cinderella" to "The Little Mermaid" to "Aladdin." This year alone we've been treated to "A Minecraft Movie," "Snow White" and "Lilo and Stitch," and an adaptation of "Moana" will appear next summer. While "Snow White" and "Lilo and Stitch" received some controversial backlash over diverting from their originals, "A Minecraft Movie" was so successful, a writer for Variety attributed it to bringing the box office back to life.

There is something comforting in the familiar, the expected, the well-told story revisited once more. Sure, it's a bit silly considering all the money that went toward making something that essentially already existed. A case could be made that this is yet another sign of our decadent times, with too much money-making and flashy technology and not enough space for new storytelling. But I still cried when Hiccup rode Toothless, the deadliest of all dragons, through clouds and over craggy cliffs for the first time.

Our world is full of disturbing uncertainty and we're constantly bombarded by a deluge of online content. Despite my own tendency toward movie remake fatigue, I found myself relaxing into the idea of this one, relieved to revisit a familiar story with familiar scenes and familiar dialogue. The predictability was surprisingly comforting. I wonder if all these remakes are, if only in small part, meeting a need for stability, responding to widespread desire for something easy, expected and even a tad bit mind-numbing in the midst of our world's frenetic turmoil.

Advertisement

It helps that "How to Train Your Dragon" remains a nourishing and uplifting story about what happens when a scrawny Viking boy befriends the dragon he's supposed to kill. Like Hiccup, I too want to believe that the evil in the world is tameable, that my enemy might become my friend. "How to Train Your Dragon" makes this seem possible.

It's easy to feel curmudgeonly about the popularity of these live-action remakes and what they represent of our preference for tranquilizing entertainment over more thought-provoking art. Then again, maybe what we need right now is a little bit of grace to simply enjoy what we enjoy, to not ask a movie to do anything other than placate our senses and make us feel, if not good, then at least OK for a few hours. Sure, there's nothing new to see here. Then again, there was never much to improve upon anyway.